

Nepal Sambat

Nepal Era (नेपाल सम्बत *Nepāl Sambat*) is the national [lunar calendar](#) of [Nepal](#).^[1] The era started on 20 October 879 AD and was in widespread use for all daily purposes until the beginning of the 20th century when it came under official disapproval. Nepal Sambat appeared on coins, stone and copper plate inscriptions, royal decrees, chronicles, [Hindu](#) and [Buddhist](#) manuscripts, legal documents and correspondence.^[2]

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Today, it is used for ceremonial purposes and to determine the dates to celebrate religious festivals and commemorate birthdays and death anniversaries. The year 2013-14 AD corresponds to 1134 in Nepal Sambat and 2070-71 in the [Bikram Sambat](#) or [Vikram Samvat](#) calendar.



Actors dressed up as Kumari vestal virgins take part in new year's Day parade in Kathmandu.



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Actors dressed up as Ajima mother goddesses take part in New Year's Day parade in Kathmandu.





Part of New Year's Day parade

National era

Following a century of official neglect and even suppression, Nepal Sambat has been revived as a symbol of Nepal's glory and national unity. In 2008, the government named it a national era.^[3] On 25 October 2011, the government decided to bring Nepal Sambat into use as the country's national calendar, and formed a taskforce to make recommendations on its implementation.^[4] However, no action has been taken after that to bring the era into practice.^[5]

During the celebrations marking New Year's Day of Nepal Sambat 1133 on 14 November 2012, the organizing committee demanded that Nepal Sambat too be printed on banknotes and coins while the prime minister pledged to give a public holiday on New Year's Day from 2013.^{[6][7]}

Removal and revival

Nepal Sambat was replaced as the national calendar in Rana period of Nepal. The victory of the Gorkha Kingdom resulted in the end of the [Malla dynasty](#) and the advent of The Shahs used [Saka era](#). However, Nepal Sambat remained in official use for a time even after the coming of the Shahs. For example, the treaty with [Tibet](#) signed during the reign of [Pratap Singh Shah](#) is dated Nepal Sambat 895 (1775 AD).

In 1903, Saka Sambat, in turn, was superseded by [Bikram Sambat](#) as the official calendar.^[8] However, the government continued to use Saka Sambat on gold and silver coins till 1912 when it was fully replaced by Bikram Sambat.^{[9][10]}


Despite the loss of legal recognition for Nepal Sambat, many people in the [Kathmandu Valley](#) and other parts of the country have continued using the calendar for ceremonial purposes. It is used to date manuscripts, books and inscriptions.^[11] Birth and death anniversaries, and almost all the religious festivals are observed according to the lunar calendar. Horoscopes are also based on the lunar calendar.

The government moved to restore the national status of Nepal Sambat following prolonged lobbying by cultural and social organizations, most prominently by [Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala](#).^[12] All the major newspapers now print Nepal Sambat along with other dates on their mastheads. New Year's Day celebrations have also spread from the Kathmandu Valley to other towns in Nepal as well as abroad.^[13]

New Year

New Year's Day falls on the first day of the waxing moon during the [Swanti festival](#).^[14] Traditionally, traders used to close their ledgers and open new account books on the first day of Nepal Sambat.

[Newars](#) observe New Year's Day by performing [Mha Puja](#) (Nepal Bhasa: म्हापूजा), a ritual to purify and empower the soul for the coming New Year besides praying for longevity.^[15] During this ceremony, family members sit cross-legged in a row on the floor in front of [mandalas](#) (sand paintings) drawn for each person. Offerings are made to the mandala, and each family member is presented auspicious ritual food which includes boiled egg, smoked fish and rice wine during the [Sagan ceremony](#).



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Outdoor celebrations of the new year consist of cultural processions, pageants, and rallies. Participants dressed in [traditional Newar clothing](#) like tapālan, suruwā and hāku patāsi parade on the streets. Musical bands playing various kinds of drums take part in the processions. Streets and market squares are decorated with arches, gates, and banners bearing new year greetings. The president of Nepal also issues a message of greetings on the occasion of New Year's Day.^[16]

Public functions are held in which the prime minister and other government leaders participate. Marking a break from tradition, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai gave his speech at the New Year's Day program in 2011 in [Nepal Bhasa](#).^[17]

Mha Puja and Nepal Sambat are also celebrated abroad where Nepalese have settled.^[18]

Nepal Sambat movement

The official restoration of Nepal Sambat follows a history of struggle which began in the 1920s when [Dharmaditya Dharmacharya](#), a Buddhist and Nepal Bhasa activist based in [Kolkata](#), began a campaign to promote it as the national calendar. The movement was continued by language and cultural activists in Nepal with the advent of democracy following the ouster of the autocratic [Rana dynasty](#) in 1951.^[19]

The demand to make Nepal Sambat a national calendar intensified with the establishment of [Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala](#) in 1979. It organized rallies and public functions publicizing the importance of the era as a symbol of nationalism. Nepal Sambat has also emerged as a symbol to rally people against the suppression of their culture, language and literature by the politically dominant ruling classes.^[20]

The [Panchayat](#) regime suppressed the movement by arresting and imprisoning the activists.^{[21][22]} In 1987 in Kathmandu, a [road running](#) event organized to mark the New Year was broken up by police and the runners thrown in jail.^[23]

The founder





Statue of [Sankhadhar Sakhwa](#) at Pulchok, Lalitpur.





Lakhu Phalchā (shelter) at Maru where the sand carriers stopped to rest.

The Nepal Sambat movement achieved its first success on 18 November 1999 when the government declared the founder of the calendar, a trader of [Kathmandu](#) named [Sankhadhar Sakhwa](#) ([संखधर साख्वा](#)), a national hero.^[24] On 26 October 2003, the Department of Postal Service issued a commemorative postage stamp depicting his portrait.^[25] A statue of Sankhadhar was erected in [Tansen, Palpa](#) in western Nepal on 28 January 2012.^[26]

The government has decided to set up Sankhadhar Sakhwa National Academy in the name of the founder of the era.^[27]

History

Nepal Sambat was started in 879 AD during the reign of King Raghav Dev to commemorate the payment of all the debts of the Nepalese people by a Nepalese trader named Sankhadhar Sakhwa.^[28] According to the legend, the astrologer of the king of [Bhaktapur](#) calculated the auspicious time and date when sand swept down by the river to the confluence of the Bhacha Khushi and [Bishnumati River](#) in [Kathmandu](#) would contain gold.

So the king sent a team of porters to Kathmandu to collect sand from the spot at the special hour. A local merchant named Sankhadhar Sakhwa saw them resting with their baskets of sand at a traveler's shelter at [Maru](#) near Durbar Square. The men had decided to take a break before returning to Bhaktapur. Sankhadhar thought it strange that people should come all this distance just to get sand. Thinking that the sand might be special, he talked the porters into dumping their load at his home, convincing them that they could always get more.

Later, Sankhadhar found gold in his sand, while the king of Bhaktapur was left with a pile of ordinary sand which his porters had dug up after the auspicious hour had passed. Sankhadhar used the windfall to repay everybody's debts and cancel their IOUs and start a new calendar.^[29] The name Nepal Sambat was used for the calendar for the first time in Nepal Sambat 148 (1028 AD).^[30]

Use outside Kathmandu

Nepal Sambat has also been used outside [Nepal Mandala](#) in Nepal and in other countries including [India](#), [China](#) and [Myanmar](#). In [Gorkha](#), a stone inscription at the Bhairav Temple at Pokharithok Bazaar contains the date Nepal Sambat 704 (1584 AD). An inscription in the [Nepali language](#) at a rest house in [Salyankot](#) is dated Nepal Sambat 912 (1792 AD).^[31]

In east Nepal, an inscription on the Bidyadhari Ajima Temple in [Bhojpur](#) recording the donation of a door and [tympanum](#) is dated Nepal Sambat 1011 (1891 AD). The Bindhyabasini Temple in [Bandipur](#) in west Nepal contains an inscription dated Nepal Sambat 950 (1830 AD) recording the donation of a tympanum.^[32]

The Palanchowk Bhagawati Temple situated to the east of Kathmandu contains an inscription recording a land donation dated Nepal Sambat 861 (1741 AD).^[33] An inscription on a [stupa](#) in [Panauti](#) is dated Nepal Sambat 866 (1746 AD).^[34]

Similarly, Nepalese merchants based in Tibet ([Lhasa Newars](#)) used Nepal Sambat in their official documents, correspondence and inscriptions recording votive offerings.^[35] A copper plate recording the donation of a tympanum at the shrine of Chhwaskamini Ajima (Tibetan: [Palden Lhamo](#)) in the [Jokhang](#) Temple in [Lhasa](#) is dated Nepal Sambat 781 (1661 AD).^[36]

Structure

Nepal Sambat, a lunar calendar, is a variant of the Saka era [Hindu calendar](#) with the main difference being that Nepal Sambat lags behind the Saka era by 802 years. It consists of 354 days per year, due to the fact that a lunar month has 29 or 30 days based on the movement of the moon. So an [intercalary month](#) is added every third year.

This calendar came into being and into official use during the reign of King Raghavdev, immediately after the completion of the Saka Sambat 802 (on 20 October 879 AD). The year 804 was approaching within a year and according to legend, his decision was guided by his fear of the number 804, that some people still believe, brings misfortune. People with traditional belief still try to escape with number 8 that comes together with 12. Doing math correctly, 804 adds up to 12 and 804 means 8 along with 12.

Nepal Sambat is a unique calendar in the sense that all other calendars are named after rulers or religious leaders. Nepal Sambat is the only calendar which is named after a country.

Months of the year

Devanagari script	Roman script	Corresponding Gregorian month	Name of Full Moon
1. कछला	Kachhalā	November	Saki Milā Punhi, Kārtik Purnimā
2. थिंला	Thinlā	December	Yomari Punhi, Dhānya Purnimā
3. पोहेला	Pohelā	January	Milā Punhi, Paush Purnimā
4. सिल्ला	Sillā	February	Si Punhi, Māghi Purnimā
5. चिल्ला	Chillā	March	Holi Punhi, Phāgu Purnimā
6. चौला	Chaulā	April	Lhuti Punhi, Bālāju Purnimā
7. बछला	Bachhalā	May	Swānyā Punhi, Baisākh Purnimā
8. तछला	Tachhalā	June	Jyā Punhi, Gaidu Purnimā
9. दिल्ला	Dillā	July	Dillā Punhi, Guru Purnimā
10. गुंला	Gunlā	August	Gun Punhi, Janāi Purnimā (Raksha Bandhan)
11. जला	Yanlā	September	Yenyā Punhi, Bhādra Purnimā
12. कौला	Kaulā	October	Katin Punhi, Kojāgrat Purnimā

An [intercalary month](#) named Anālā (अनाला) is added every three years.^[37]

Milestones

888 Nepal Sambat (1768) - [Prithvi Narayan Shah](#)'s Gorkhali forces take Kathmandu.

926 (1806) - Bhandarkhal Massacre establishes [Bhimsen Thapa](#) as the prime minister of Nepal.

966 (1846) - [Kot massacre](#) establishes [Jang Bahadur Rana](#) as the prime minister of Nepal and the [Rana dynasty](#).

1054 (1934) - Great Earthquake strikes Nepal.

1061 (1941) - Four martyrs executed by the Rana regime.

1071 (1951) - Revolution topples Rana regime and establishes democracy.

1080 (1960) - Parliamentary system abolished and [Panchayat](#) system established.

1111 (1991) - First parliamentary election held after abolition of Panchayat and reinstatement of democracy.

1121 (2001) - The king, queen and other members of the royal family are killed in [Nepalese royal massacre](#).

1128 (2008) - Nepal becomes a republic.^[38]

Gallery





Coin issued in the name of King Ranjit Malla dated Nepal Era 842 (1722 AD)





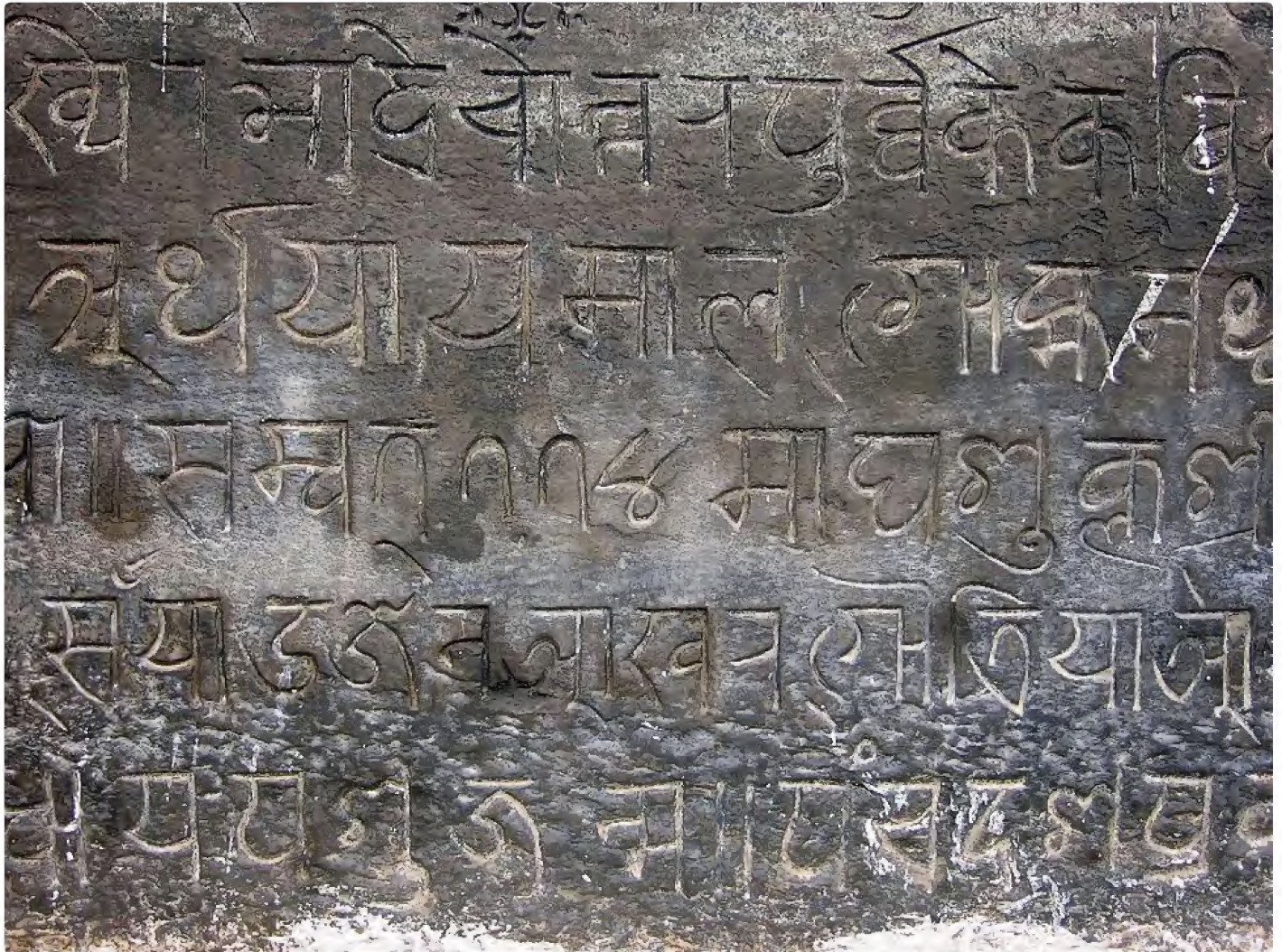
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Coin issued in the name of King Prithvi Narayan Shah dated Saka Era 1685 (1763 AD)



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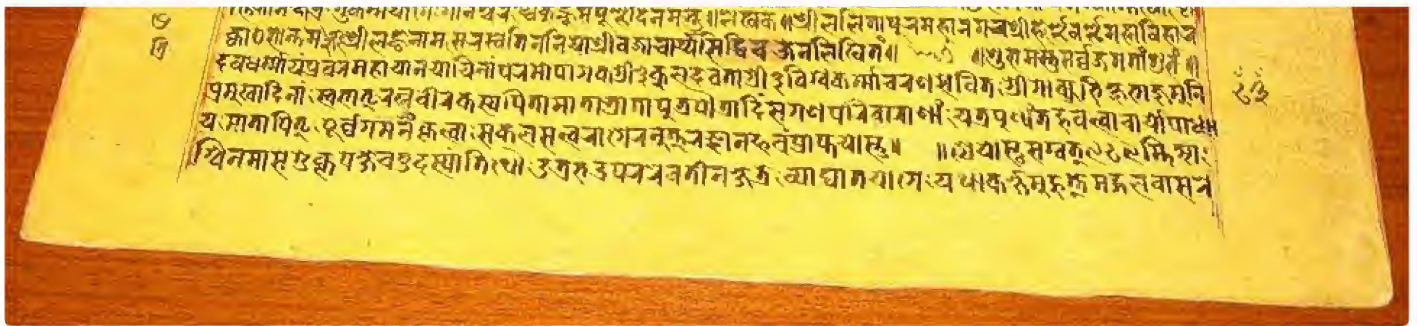
Coin issued in the name of King Surendra Bikram Shah dated 1788 Saka Era (1866 AD)



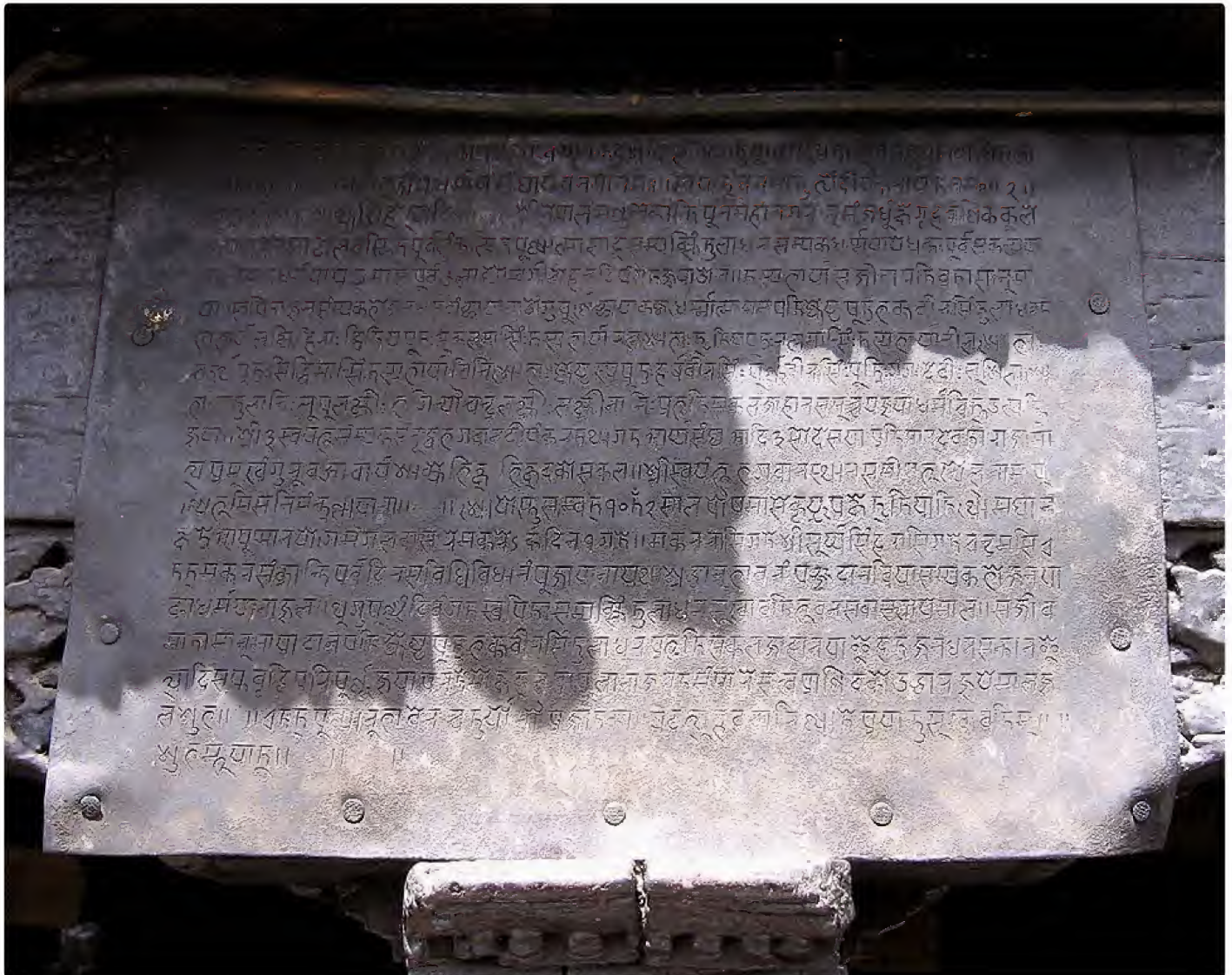
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King Pratap Malla's inscription at Durbar Square dated Nepal Era 774 (1654 AD)





Sanskrit Buddhist manuscript dated Nepal Era 989 (1869 AD)



Copper plate inscription dated Nepal Era 1072 (1952 AD)

See also

- Mha Puja
- Swanti (festival)
- Lunar calendar
- Lunar phase

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